



Local Class Alliance

The politics of class alliance are well understood and well executed at national level in South Africa in terms of the **National Democratic Revolution** (NDR) policy developed during the last nine decades, which led directly to the democratic breakthrough of 1994.

The NDR remains the dominant framework of South African politics, having been refreshed at Polokwane in 2007. At national level, the interests of the working class continue to be well articulated through the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the trade union movement whose largest centre is COSATU.

The petty bourgeoisie and peasantry, on the other hand, have weak political expression at national level, in the form of SANCO. This is a consequence of the “sack-of-potatoes” nature of both of these two classes: the rural petty-bourgeois who are the peasants; and the urban peasants, who are the petty-bourgeoisie.

Both these classes are made up of individualists who aspire to live autonomously as families, with everything of their own. The working class is compelled to represent the interests of these mostly extremely poor sections of the population at national level. Otherwise, the established big bourgeoisie would quickly exploit the poorer ones as political foot-soldiers for capitalism, or possibly for demagogic fascism.

The monopolists also, in practice, exploit the peasants and the petty bourgeois directly, feeding off their younger brothers and sisters in the predatory way which Rosa Luxemburg described so well in Chapter 2 of “[Reform or Revolution?](#)” from which our main text (attached) is taken.

Local class politics

But at local level, in South Africa, the situation of the working-class vis-à-vis the petty-bourgeoisie and peasantry is reversed. The organised working class has hardly any formal presence either at electoral ward level (where ANC branches are organised), or at voting district level. Here, the petty-bourgeois individualists are working on their home ground and at the scale of their own business operations. COSATU Locals and Socialist Forums are in the shade, if they exist at all.

The SACP generates cadres, and organises and assists the masses, including the ANC, in many different ways, but it has not stood candidates in elections for many years. Whether its electoral practice changes, or not, the SACP is supposed to make a major impact at local level when the entire party is re-organised into Voting-District-based branches.

Advantage reversed at local level

In terms of theory, there is relatively little that would serve as ideological guidance to the working class on the topic of local development, whereas the petty-bourgeoisie has an abundance of material and history to lean on, some of which we will unpack in more detail during this part of our course.

The town is the birthplace of the bourgeoisie and it is the natural territory of the petty-bourgeoisie. The municipality is the “executive committee” of the local bourgeoisie. Not only is it their instrument, but it is their regenerator, whose job it is to reproduce bourgeois relations at local level and to bring forth new generations of bourgeois-minded councillors and bureaucrats.

Organs of People’s Power

In the past, one effective working-class tactic was to confront this concentration of local bourgeois strength with an organised democratic power such as, in South Africa, what were known as “Civics”. In Russia, long before the revolutions of 1917, this movement took the form of “soviets”. The first one, as [Vladimir](#)

[Shubin](#) relates, was set up in the textile manufacturing centre of [Ivanovo](#) in 1905. Another tactic, problematic though it has been, is the setting up of producer and consumer co-operatives. This series will attempt to develop both of these perspectives in due course.

In this part, our CU job is to review some of the debate in the literature of petty-bourgeois development. It is not the aim of the working-class to drive any other class to premature extinction. In the “[18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte](#)” Karl Marx described the peasantry, with sympathy, as a “sack of potatoes”, because they could not unite at national level. In the spirit of this work, the working class must unite the weaker classes and lead them, and make provision for them in terms that will satisfy them.

For the classic peasantry, this meant giving them land and a market for their produce. For the petty bourgeoisie, it is the freedom to do business, and the guarantee, in the face of the predatory monopolists, of a market. As much as they need us, so also do we, as the proletariat, need these classes as allies against the monopoly bourgeoisie. Therefore, as partisans of the working class, we should read these works with a serious interest.

How will things change? The communists must strive to reproduce, in every locality, the same well-expressed and solid class alliance which has up to now underpinned the NDR at the national level. This means providing for both the petty-bourgeoisie/peasantry, and for the working class. These classes

must be able to see a clear way forward, in alliance with each other, at local level, where, at present, it is working-class organisation that is lacking.

Illustration: The hammer-and-sickle emblem of the communists represents the **alliance of workers and peasants**.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Reform or Revolution?, Chapters 2, 7, 9 and 10, Luxemburg](#).
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